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Empowering Our Ministry: The Spiritual Gift of Exhortation

Matthew 6:25-33

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This morning I would like to focus on the spiritual gift of exhortation, the distinctive ability to appropriately communicate words of encouragement, challenge, or rebuke in the body of Christ, that is, in our church community here at CPC. The idea behind exhortation is to come along side a fellow believer. The Greek word is *parakaleo*, which comes from *para* (to the side) and *kaleo* (to call). It's being called to the side of someone. In fact, the word is often used to describe the Holy Spirit, who is known as the Paraclete, the best of the best at coming along side us as we grow in maturity and learn to exercise spiritual gifts in the context of ministry.

The person with the gift of exhortation walks into a room of fellow believers, and (as with all spiritual gifts) asks God to give some direction for the specific use of their gift. The Holy Spirit may direct you to that person, who needs a word of encouragement. Or the Holy Spirit may direct you to that person over there, who needs you to tell them to get off their duff and heed the word God has already given them. In such cases, you, the person with the gift of exhortation, isn't being told what the person's exact situation is, or their history, or anything like that. You are just being led to bring your gift to bear with a person. You are being led to offer a kind of word to the other, perhaps a word of consolation, perhaps a word of rebuke.

I like to think of exhortation as *individualized reminders of God's provision and faithfulness*. The exhortation-gifted believer listens to the voice of the Good Shepherd, and recognizes the voice saying, 'Go to her and give her a word of encouragement; remind her that I love her and have provided for her; spend some time with her so that she stops feeling overwhelmed by the stuff that's recently happened, and re-focuses her attention on Me.'

Now, it's not that the exhortation-gifted person knows what's going on with the person to whom they are sent. The exhortation-gifted person doesn't intuitively know what 'stuff' has recently happened; that would be a gift of knowledge. No, the exhortation-gifted person is simply directed to go to the someone, and is directed to use their gift of exhortation. How are they directed? In the same way that everyone with a spiritual gift gets direction - by listening to the voice of the Shepherd, by practicing a listening form of prayer, so that you know that Voice, and trust that Voice, and can be obedient to that Voice, and go to whom the Voice directs you to go, and do what you have been gifted to do.

So you might walk into a room of fellow believers, and stop for a moment, and listen to see if the Holy Spirit is directing you in any way. You perhaps get the sense that you should speak to someone. Or, in the context of conversation that evening, you get the sense that you should follow-up with a particular person. If you practice your gift of exhortation, you will eventually be able to decipher the sense as a word from the Holy Spirit, that is, you will recognize the Voice of the shepherd when He speaks to you. The word from the Holy Spirit will come to you as an urging, a nudging, to speak to someone, and you will also get the

sense of what you should say. You'll know you need to bring encouragement or perhaps rebuke, without knowing the specifics of the situation.

So, what the exhortation-gifted person does, is find a moment to be relatively private with the person, and ask to talk a while. You'll ask what's going on with the other, and with your Spirit-led demeanor, as information flows to you from the person to whom you were sent, you'll get even more clarity of what you are to say. In the end, through your encouragement, through your prayer-led perception, you will build up the brother or sister by reminding the person of God's love and faithfulness. And it will be just the word from the Lord they needed to hear. The right word at the right time.

The classic New Testament exhorter was Barnabas. He helped needy believers. He was the first to recognize that Paul, formerly a persecutor of the church, could now be trusted. He was sent by the church to encourage the newly converted. He saw potential in a friend. And he was willing to let another be in first place. You see, the motto of the exhortation-gifted person is, 'there's no limit to what can be done if we don't care who gets the credit.' Their operative verses are in Matthew 6 … don't be *so* anxious, God *will* provide, God *will* be faithful!

At one point, Mark was travelling with Paul on one of the missionary journeys. For a reason which the Scripture doesn't make clear, Mark (also known as 'John Mark') left Paul mid-journey. But we know that Paul was pretty upset about this leaving, and when the opportunity for the next missionary journey came around, Paul wasn't willing to take Mark along. What Paul wanted was to partner with Barnabas, ever-effective Barnabas, the encourager, the exhorter, the person with a key spiritual gift which Paul well knew he didn't possess.

But Barnabas was led by the Holy Spirit to see something in Mark, something which Paul was blind to see. Barnabas insisted that Mark come along. Paul said, 'no way.' Apparently, this was really important to Barnabas because, in the end, he took off with Mark, and Paul took off with Silas. The interesting part of this story is that much later, near the end of his life, while under house arrest, Paul writes to Timothy, telling him to bring Mark to him. It turned out Barnabas was right.

Barnabas didn't write any books in the New Testament. He was just the Spirit-led guy who stood beside Paul (who wrote thirteen books) and beside Mark (who wrote the first Gospel).

The character qualities and personality traits associated with the exhortation-gifted person are:

(1) Someone who is action oriented and needs to see results

(2) Someone who knows that trials and tribulations bring new levels of maturity

(3) Someone who focuses on 'how' to solve a problem. The exhortation-gifted person is not as interested in exposing the problem, or knowing why the problem developed, or even in explaining the problem, as in telling step-by-step how to solve it. The exhorter believes in 'fixing the problem, not the blame.'

(4) Someone who is willing to get personally involved in helping.

(5) Someone who may become discouraged if there is no response.

(6) Someone who tends to be disciplined, methodical, patient, consistent, and dependable.

I want you to think about this spiritual gift of exhortation. Is this your gift? Our body really needs you. We need people who are able to be exhorters in our midst, in the midst of the body of Christ, and to hear the Voice of the shepherd, and to move with confidence towards those whose situation you don't completely know, but you move nonetheless, confident that the Spirit is leading you bring a word of encouragement, perhaps a word of gentle rebuke, always a word from the Lord, a reminder of God's provision and faithfulness. We need YOU.

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